

## **Bases of Entitlement Among the Narcissistic Subtypes**

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Version Date: 3/30/2016

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### **Abstract**

This research examines whether two people can be highly entitled but arrive at that conclusion in different ways. Using a lens of trait narcissism, we predicted that grandiose narcissists (GNs) hold superiority-based entitlement whereas vulnerable narcissists (VNs) hold inferiority-based entitlement. Participants across two studies ( $n = 135\text{--}280$ ) completed narcissism and entitlement measures. Study 1 participants selected domains (e.g., admiration, power) to which they felt entitled and indicated reasons why. Study 2 tested mediation models including measures of superiority (i.e. perceived status) and inferiority (i.e. perceived victimhood). Both narcissistic subtypes reported high levels of entitlement. However, GNs based their entitlement on inherent superiority (e.g. “I am naturally deserving”). This perception mediates associations between GN and entitlement. In contrast, VNs felt entitled based on their perception of being unfairly worse off (e.g. “I have been disadvantaged in the past”). This perception mediates associations between VN and entitlement. This work furthers theoretical understanding on a core trait shared by the narcissistic subtypes and illuminates differences in how people conclude that they are deserving. We discuss potential psychological consequences of superiority- vs. inferiority-based entitlement as well as ways this distinction may inform practical application.

**Key Words:** Entitlement, Grandiose Narcissism, Vulnerable Narcissism, Individual Differences

Picture the college undergraduate who expects a good grade simply because she's attended every class. Picture the ungrateful child who expects money from his parents. Picture the arrogant employee who expects a raise regardless of her performance. Picture the gunman who expected sex and murdered sorority women for the "crime" of denying him such and other men for having what he wanted (Yan, Brumfield, & Carter, 2014).

These examples all relate to a common core: entitlement. Generally speaking, entitlement is an expectation that one has rights to certain outcomes (Merriam-Webster's online dictionary, n.d.). In psychological literature, the concept has been defined as a "stable and pervasive sense that the individual deserves more [...] than others" (Campbell, Bonacci, Shelton, Exline, & Bushman, 2004, p.31) as well as an expectation of special favors from others (Emmons, 1984). Though academic interest in the concept of entitlement has increased in recent years, little is known about how individuals arrive at a conclusion that they deserve special treatment and special outcomes. The current paper aims to explore the possibility that while entitlement can be defined as a unitary construct, this sense of deservingness can stem from different processes. Specifically, we argue that entitlement may arise through superiority- or inferiority-based reasoning.

### **The Study of Entitlement**

Although having some entitlement can be beneficial as it helps women ask for the pay they deserve (Major, 1994) and is associated with greater creativity (Zitek & Vincent, 2015), it is more often identified as a predictor of negative consequences. For example, more highly entitled people believe that they deserve higher salaries than their coworkers (Campbell et al., 2004), engage in more selfish and fewer helpful behaviors (Zitek, Jordan, Monin, & Leach, 2010), and exhibit greater prejudice toward outgroups independent of ingroup identification (Anastasio &

Rose, 2014). Higher entitlement is also associated with endorsement of hostile sexism among men and benevolent sexism among women (Grubbs, Exline, & Twenge, 2014). Academically entitled college students externalize responsibility for course outcomes to a greater degree than their less entitled peers (Boswell, 2012). In the workplace, high entitlement is associated with lower job satisfaction and increased conflict with supervisors (Harvey & Martinko, 2009). The destructive effects of entitlement reach even further: Hill and Fischer (2001) found that male entitlement mediates the positive relation between masculinity and attitudes or behaviors related to rape. Psychological entitlement is also higher among violent offenders than non-violent offenders, and offenders are more likely to engage in violent behavior when their sense of entitlement is violated (Fisher & Hall, 2011).

These detrimental effects already known to be associated with high entitlement raise the question of whether all entitled people behave based on the same belief, “I deserve more, I deserve special treatment,” or if the bases for their entitlement can be vastly different. If individuals justify a sense of entitlement in different ways, it could provide a meaningful distinction when trying to predict other beliefs or behaviors.

### **The Case of Grandiose and Vulnerable Narcissism**

In this paper, we examine different bases of entitlement through the lens of trait narcissism<sup>1</sup>, a population known to be extremely entitled (e.g., Akhtar & Thomson, 1982; Raskin & Terry, 1988). Recent research supports the division of narcissism into two subtypes: grandiose and vulnerable narcissism (Dickinson & Pincus, 2003; Miller, Hoffman, Gaughan, Gentile, Maples, & Campbell, 2011; Wink, 1991). The two narcissistic subtypes share a core of narcissistic features, including interpersonal antagonism and self-absorption (Krizan & Johar,

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<sup>1</sup> Although it is a continuous construct, for brevity, we refer to people high in trait narcissism as “narcissists.”

2012; Miller et al., 2011), but differ in other characteristics. These unique beliefs and experiences of the subtypes may help isolate the proposed differences in how entitlement can be formed or justified.

Grandiose narcissists are confident and charismatic (Emmons, 1984), impulsive (Vazire & Funder, 2006), manipulative (Wink, 1991), superior (Krizan & Bushman, 2011), and high in self-esteem (Rose, 2002). These narcissists are chronic self-enhancers (Paulhus, 1998) who are socially charming (Rose, 2002), but value admiration much more than approval (Collins & Stukas, 2008). Grandiose narcissists have a strong desire for power and status (Campbell & Foster, 2007) and a high approach motivation (Foster & Trimm, 2008).

In contrast, vulnerable narcissists are hypersensitive (Hendin & Cheek, 1997), anxious (Rathvon & Holmstrom, 1996), and socially inhibited (Given-Wilson, McIlwain, & Warburton, 2011). Vulnerable narcissists lack initiative (Kernberg, 1986) and self-confidence (Wink, 1991). These individuals rely heavily on the feedback of others to manage their self-esteem (Besser & Priel, 2010), which is chronically low (Rose, 2002), but are simultaneously suspicious of the motives of others (Wink, 1991). Vulnerable narcissists are preoccupied with grandiose fantasies (Rohmann, Neumann, Herner, & Bierhoff, 2012) and are prone to feeling like others have failed to recognize their importance (Given-Wilson et al., 2011).

Despite their very divergent psychological and interpersonal experiences, studies have shown that both grandiose and vulnerable narcissists are highly entitled. For example, in a study of narcissistic subtypes and cognitive schemas, grandiose and vulnerable narcissism were both positively associated with the cognitive schema of entitlement (Zeigler-Hill, Green, Arnau, Sisemore, & Myers, 2011). Similarly, Krizan & Johar (2012) factor-analyzed several narcissism scales to produce a factor of narcissistic vulnerability and a factor of narcissistic grandiosity;

both factors were associated with psychological entitlement. Miller and colleagues (2011) also derived two narcissism factors from multiple scales, which mapped on to grandiose and vulnerable narcissism; both factors manifested positive correlations with entitlement, and the two correlations did not significantly differ from each other. This likely stems from their shared characteristic of self-absorption, or lack of empathy (Vonk, Zeigler-Hill, Mayhew, & Mercer, 2013). Choosing to direct focus away from others' situations, narcissists are mainly cognizant of their own situation and their own desires, placing their own perceived deservingness as top priority.

Yet, it seems incongruous for grandiose and vulnerable narcissists to share a sense of heightened entitlement to good outcomes but undergo such subjectively different experiences of the world. Since each type of narcissist scores vastly different on measures of self-esteem, these different self-views are likely to color their experience on the dimension of entitlement which is thought to link these two narcissists together. Along these lines, Miller and colleagues (2011) previously speculated that grandiose narcissists may feel entitled to good outcomes because they believe they are better than others, whereas vulnerable narcissists may feel entitled to good outcomes because they believe they are fragile. We make a somewhat similar argument. Specifically, we propose that while both narcissists are highly entitled, grandiose narcissists' entitlement is based on their perception that they hold superior internal characteristics and experiences (i.e. superiority-based entitlement). In contrast, we predict that vulnerable narcissists feel entitled based on their perception that they have been disadvantaged in life compared to others, or have not received the same outcomes that others have (i.e. inferiority-based entitlement).

**Superior vs. Inferior Bases of Entitlement**

Support for our hypotheses that grandiose narcissists hold superiority-based entitlement and vulnerable narcissists hold inferiority-based entitlement stems from an analysis of the narcissistic subtypes' characteristics. Grandiose narcissists are highly self-confident and largely impervious to external threats. They are primarily concerned with the self, as evidenced by their willingness to take advantage of others and promote their own interests and well-being at the expense of others (Campbell, Bush, Brunell, & Shelton, 2005; Paulhus, 1998). Even when grandiose narcissists do compare themselves to others, such comparisons are typically upward and favorable to the narcissist (Krizan & Bushman, 2011). Their self-esteem is chronically high, as is their well-being (Rose, 2002), and they employ self-promoting and interpersonally insensitive strategies to procure good outcomes for themselves (Kernis & Sun, 1994; Stucke, 2003). Thus, it seems likely that grandiose narcissists feel entitled based on their inherently superior characteristics.

Further evidence for the hypothesis that grandiose narcissists' sense of entitlement is superiority-based derives from past research on narcissism and aggression. Grandiose narcissists seem to possess a core sense of self-importance and deservingness, which is not easily touched by external feedback. Many studies have demonstrated that grandiose narcissists easily externalize threat by reacting in aggressive or punitive ways in direct response to an ego threat (e.g., Bushman & Baumeister, 1998; Bushman, Bonacci, Van Dijk, & Baumeister, 2003; Exline, Baumeister, Bushman, Campbell, & Finkel, 2004; Stucke & Sporer, 2002; Twenge & Campbell, 2003). Furthermore, grandiose narcissism is positively associated with anger externalization and negatively associated with internalization of negative emotions (Stucke, 2003; Stucke & Sporer, 2002; Twenge & Campbell, 2003). Thus, grandiose narcissists maintain their self-worth and

sense of inherent superiority, suggesting that grandiose narcissists' sense of entitlement is likely based on their perception of having superior characteristics.

Vulnerable narcissists, on the other hand, are extremely sensitive and highly reactive to interpersonal threats (Besser & Priel, 2010; Dickinson & Pincus, 2003; Gabbard, 1989). For example, vulnerable narcissists tend to internalize negative emotions such as shame and anxiety after receiving feedback (Atlas & Them, 2008; Freis, Brown, Carroll, & Arkin, 2015; Malkin, Barry, & Zeigler-Hill, 2011). Thus, in stark contrast to grandiose narcissists, vulnerable narcissists depend greatly on the opinions and feedback of others (e.g., Besser & Priel, 2010; Malkin et al., 2011; Wink, 1991), basing their self-worth in nearly every conceivable domain, including family support and others' approval (Zeigler-Hill et al., 2008). This leads vulnerable narcissists to depend largely on how they are valued by others and how they live up to others' standards. Overall, vulnerable narcissists seem to lack the well-protected, inflated core<sup>2</sup> that grandiose narcissists have. Vulnerable narcissists are avoidant and self-protective (Dickinson & Pincus, 2003; Foster & Trimm, 2008), and are motivated by perceived threats, losses, or injustices to the self. In fact, past researchers have speculated that these narcissists exhibit a hostile attribution bias where they believe that others have malevolent intentions toward them (Miller, Dir, Gentile, Wilson, Pryor, & Campbell, 2010). Importantly, these narcissists have chronically low self-esteem (Rose, 2002) and feel incapable of achieving their desired goals (Brown, Freis, Carroll, & Arkin, 2016).

Due to vulnerable narcissists' poor self-views and sensitivity to threats, they can be especially susceptible to upward social comparisons. This leaves vulnerable narcissists

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<sup>2</sup> Historical narcissism research explored the "mask hypothesis" in which the confident exterior of grandiose narcissism hides an insecure center. However, a recent meta-analysis (Bosson, Lakey, Campbell, Zeigler-Hill, Jordan, & Kernis, 2008) found no overall support for the mask hypothesis when analyzing data from over 1000 total participants, indicating that grandiose narcissists do not have a fragile core. They genuinely like themselves and believe in their own greatness.

susceptible to feelings of envy as they perceive others' successes as unjust or out of reach (Krizan & Johar, 2012). With such poor self-views, it seems unlikely that vulnerable narcissists are entitled based on a perception that they are superior; instead, they may feel entitled based on their perceptions of disadvantage where they view others as unfairly better off than them. We propose this feeling of inferiority forms the basis of vulnerable narcissists' sense of entitlement.

### **The Current Research**

The present studies were designed to identify the divergent bases of entitlement for grandiose and vulnerable narcissists. Study 1 was designed to show that a) both narcissists are highly entitled, replicating past work, and b) to begin exploring which domains narcissists felt more entitled to and why. Participants' justifications were collected in order to provide initial evidence for our proposed entitlement bases. Study 2 was designed to further solidify the different mechanisms or bases through which grandiose and vulnerable narcissists conclude they are highly deserving.

Broadly speaking, we hypothesized that the narcissistic subtypes would each report high entitlement and feel entitled to similar domains, but they would come to hold these entitled beliefs through different processes. Grandiose narcissists were expected to report feeling entitled due to their perceptions of superiority, whereas vulnerable narcissists were expected to report a high sense of entitlement due to their perceptions of inferiority or feeling unfairly disadvantaged.

### **Study 1**

Study 1 examined shared characteristics and beliefs among the narcissistic subtypes. Furthermore, this study aimed to provide initial support for the superiority- vs. inferiority-based entitlement hypothesis.



## Method

**Participants** Participants were 280 Ohio State University undergraduate students (142 female, ages 18-30, 225 Caucasian, 175 freshman), who completed the study in exchange for course credit.

**Procedure** Participants were sent a link to the online study. After completing a consent form, participants began by completing a series of self-report questionnaires, including measures of grandiose and vulnerable narcissism and entitlement. Following the questionnaires, participants were asked to select their top three choices from a list of 12 entitlement domains in terms of which domains best reflect what they generally feel most entitled to. The 12 entitlement domains were listed in alphabetical order and consisted of admiration, appreciation, attention, friendship, happiness, influence, power, recognition, respect, status, voice, and wealth. After making their three selections, participants were asked to explain their choices. First, in free response form, participants explained why they felt entitled to or deserving of the selected domain. Next, participants were asked to select one out of seven possible presented reasons that best explained why they felt entitled to the choices previously selected (e.g. respect, wealth, etc.). These reasons included: “I greatly desire it,” “Everyone is deserving of this,” “I am naturally deserving,” “I have been disadvantaged in the past,” “I am hard working,” “I am no different than everyone else,” and “Others have this and I do not.” Participants then rated all 12 of the entitlement domains in terms of whether or not they perceived the entitlement domain to be generally good or bad to have. This was on a 7-point scale from “Very Bad” to “Very Good.” At the end of the study, participants were probed for suspicion, asked to report their demographics, and debriefed.

**Measures** Participants completed the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Terry, 1988) to assess grandiose narcissism (Krizan & Johar, 2012; 2014; Miller & Campbell, 2008). The NPI uses 40 dichotomous items in which participants chose between one of two sentences that best describes them. For example, a participant would choose between a) “I am no better or worse than most people” and b) “I think I am a special person”, where the second sentence is the more narcissistic answer. Because there is no consistent factor analysis for the NPI (e.g. Raskin & Terry, 1988; Emmons 1984), we used the total NPI score ( $\alpha = .85$ ).

Next, participants completed the Hypersensitive Narcissistic Scale (HSNS; Hendin & Cheek, 1997) to measure vulnerable narcissism. This ten item measure is rated on a 5-point scale from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree.” Example items included “My feelings are easily hurt by ridicule or by the slighting remarks of others” and “I dislike being with a group unless I know that I am appreciated by at least one of those present.” The items were averaged to create a total score of vulnerable narcissism ( $\alpha = .75$ ).

Remaining self-report questionnaires included the Psychological Entitlement Scale (PES; Campbell, Bonacci, Shelton, Exline, & Bushman, 2004) and the Entitlement Rage subscale from the Pathological Narcissism Inventory (PNI-Rage; Pincus, Ansell, Pimentel, Cain, Wright, & Levy, 2009) to assess trait entitlement. The PES consists of nine items while the PNI-Rage subscale consists of eight items, both rated on a 7-point scale from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree.” Example items from the PES include “I honestly feel I’m just more deserving than others” and “People like me deserve an extra break now and then.” Example PNI-Rage items include “It irritates me when people don’t notice how good a person I am” and “I get mad when people don’t notice all that I do for them.” Items were averaged to create a total score of entitlement and entitlement rage (PES,  $\alpha = .88$ ; PNI-Rage,  $\alpha = .83$ ).

**Hypotheses** We predicted that individuals higher in grandiose or vulnerable narcissism would report high entitlement, and that each narcissistic subtype would feel entitled to similar domains, showing further overlap or similarity between the narcissists. In comparison, we predicted that the subtypes would diverge when explaining why they were entitled. Specifically, vulnerable narcissists were expected to give justifications for their entitlement choices based on their feelings of disadvantage (i.e. inferiority-based entitlement) whereas grandiose narcissists were expected to explain their entitlement choices through their natural or inherent deservingness (i.e. superiority-based entitlement).

## Results & Discussion

**Commonalities Among Narcissists** Table 1 outlines the correlations, means, and standard deviations of continuous variables used in this study. All continuous predictor variables were mean-centered prior to conducting regression analyses. Both the NPI and HSNS showed significant positive correlations with psychological entitlement (PES) and entitlement rage (PNI-Rage). These correlational results replicate past evidence (e.g. Miller, Price, Gentile, Lynam, & Campbell, 2012) that both narcissistic subtypes share the characteristic of high entitlement.

| Table 1  |        |        |        |       |      |
|--|--------|--------|--------|-------|------|
| <i>Study 1 Variables: Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations</i> |        |        |        |       |      |
| Variable   | 1      | 2      | 3      | Mean  | SD   |
| 1. NPI   |        |        |        | 16.95 | 7.21 |
| 2. HSNS  | -.02   |        |        | 3.97  | .88  |
| 3. PES   | .39*** | .26*** |        | 3.36  | 1.03 |
| 4. PNI-Rage  | .23*** | .44*** | .46*** | 4.10  | 1.00 |

*Note.* NPI = Narcissistic Personality Inventory measure of grandiose narcissism; HSNS = Hypersensitivity Scale measure of vulnerable narcissism; PES = Psychological Entitlement Scale; PNI-Rage = Entitlement Rage subscale of the Pathological Narcissism Inventory. \*  $p \leq .05$ ; \*\*  $p \leq .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$

Regressing the different entitlement domains onto the NPI and HSNS separately shows that individuals who scored high on the NPI or high on the HSNS give similar ratings on whether

or not they view certain domains as good or bad to have (see Table 2). Specifically, grandiose and vulnerable narcissists both report feeling entitled to admiration, appreciation, attention, power, recognition, status, and wealth. These similarities again provide evidence for overlap between the narcissistic subtypes. Both subtypes are not only highly entitled but generally feel entitled in the same domains.

| Table 2                               |          |           |                   |          |           |                   |
|---------------------------------------|----------|-----------|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------------------|
| <i>Entitlement Domain Regressions</i> |          |           |                   |          |           |                   |
|                                       | NPI      |           |                   | HSNS     |           |                   |
|                                       | <i>b</i> | <i>SE</i> | <i>t</i> (1, 279) | <i>b</i> | <i>SE</i> | <i>t</i> (1, 279) |
| Admiration                            | .05      | .01       | 3.98***           | .27      | .10       | 2.87**            |
| Appreciation                          | .03      | .01       | 3.05**            | .17      | .07       | 2.30*             |
| Attention                             | .05      | .01       | 3.97***           | .36      | .10       | 3.64***           |
| Friendship                            | .004     | .01       | .52               | .07      | .06       | 1.09              |
| Happiness                             | .01      | .01       | 1.08              | -.01     | .06       | -0.09             |
| Influence                             | .05      | .01       | 5.14***           | .10      | .09       | 1.07              |
| Power                                 | .09      | .01       | 6.49***           | .23      | .11       | 2.14*             |
| Recognition                           | .04      | .01       | 4.23***           | .27      | .09       | 3.16**            |
| Respect                               | .01      | .01       | 1.41              | -.01     | .06       | -.22              |
| Status                                | .08      | .01       | 5.49***           | .36      | .10       | 3.50***           |
| Voice                                 | .01      | .01       | .73               | .19      | .07       | 2.75**            |
| Wealth                                | .06      | .01       | 4.45***           | .31      | .12       | 2.66**            |

*Note.* Perceptions of whether or not it is generally good or bad to feel entitled in specific domains. \*  $p \leq .05$ ; \*\*  $p \leq .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$

**Divergences Among Narcissists** Aside from rating entitlement domains in terms of whether they are generally good or bad to have, participants also chose three specific domains they felt most entitled to and then explained their choices through both an open-ended response question and by selecting explanations that best represented their opinions. Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC; Pennebaker, Booth, & Francis, 2007) analyses found no significant differences in participants' open-ended responses in justifying their entitlement selections. However, analyzing which justifications participants chose to explain why they felt entitled produced significant results. Because selecting explanations for entitlement domain choices were

presented categorically, the analyses of choice justifications required logistical regression. Variables were dummy-coded to reflect whether or not individual choice justifications were selected.

Logistically regressing entitlement choice justifications onto the NPI revealed that individuals high on the NPI were more likely to explain their entitlement choices by selecting the following statements: “I am naturally deserving,” “I greatly desire it,” and “I am hard working,” all  $bs > .06$ , all  $SE < .03$ , all Wald  $X^2 > 8.83$ , all  $ps < .01$ . Individuals high on the NPI were also less likely to say they chose entitlements based on the reason that “Everyone is deserving of [it],”  $b = -.13$ ,  $SE = .03$ , Wald  $X^2 = 13.73$ ,  $p < .001$ . The NPI was not significantly predictive of any other entitlement choice justification statement, all  $ps > .62$ . The NPI results are initial evidence supporting the hypothesis that grandiose narcissists base their feelings of entitlement more on their perceived superiority. Grandiose narcissists feel naturally deserving and believe that others are not. Not seeing others as deserving likely helps to maintain the narcissists’ sense of specialness or advantage compared to others, whether or not that advantage is seen as fair.

In comparison, logistically regressing entitlement choice justifications onto the HSNS showed that individuals high on the HSNS were significantly more likely than those low on the HSNS to justify their choice of entitlements with the statement, “I have been disadvantaged in the past,”  $b = .69$ ,  $SE = .33$ , Wald  $X^2 = 4.39$ ,  $p < .05$ . Individuals high on the HSNS were also marginally more likely to justify their choice of entitlements with the statement, “Others have this and I do not,”  $b = .75$ ,  $SE = .42$ , Wald  $X^2 = 3.20$ ,  $p = .07$ . The HSNS was not significantly predictive of any other entitlement choice justification statement, all  $ps > .18$ . The HSNS results provide initial support for the hypothesis that vulnerable narcissists have more inferiority-based entitlement. Instead of feeling “naturally deserving” like grandiose narcissists, vulnerable

narcissists are very sensitive to what others have and feel unfairly deprived in some way, whether that be from the experiences, relationships, material goods, or characteristics that others seem to possess. Vulnerable narcissists believe it is unfair that they do not have what others do; and this judgment of fairness likely leads to such strong entitlement beliefs. Study 2 aimed to more directly test this claim of process.

## **Study 2**

Study 1 replicated past literature showing the commonality between narcissistic subtypes through the characteristic of high entitlement. Reasons for the narcissistic subtypes' entitlement, however, diverged. Study 2 aimed to examine these differences further by investigating how grandiose and vulnerable narcissists' perceptions of superiority or inferiority may explain the mechanism through which they independently come to feel entitled.

## **Method**

**Participants** Participants were 135 Ohio State University undergraduate students (92 female, ages 18-26, 114 Caucasian, 101 freshman), who completed the study in exchange for course credit.

**Procedure** After completing a consent form, participants filled out a series of self-report questionnaires, including measures of grandiose and vulnerable narcissism, entitlement, and perceptions of superiority and inferiority. At the end of the study, participants were probed for suspicion, asked to report their demographics, and debriefed

**Measures** Participants completed the shortened 16-item Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI-16; Ames, Rose, & Anderson, 2006) to assess grandiose narcissism. We once again took the total score of participants' responses to the dichotomous items ( $\alpha = .73$ ). Then, identical to Study 1, participants completed the HSNS and PES.

Next, participants completed a measure of superiority where they were asked about their perceptions of status, including, “In general, I am often better than other group members.” This statement was rated on a 7-point scale from “Not at all like me” to “Just like me.”

Participants then completed the Justice Sensitivity Inventory (JSI; Schmitt, Baumert, Gollwitzer, & Maes, 2010) to further investigate the fairness judgments of grandiose and vulnerable narcissists based on a sense of superiority versus inferiority. Specifically, the JSI has four subscales intended to capture what a person perceives as just or fair from the perspective of a victim, observer, beneficiary, and perpetrator. Each subscale consists of 10 similarly worded items rated on a 7-point scale from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree” and are adjusted based on the specific perspective in question. The Victim Sensitivity subscale ( $\alpha = .87$ ) asks participants to look at situations to the advantage of others and to their own disadvantage; for instance, “It makes me angry when others are undeservingly better off than me.” This was our primary measure of participants’ perceptions of inferiority.

The other subscales included the following. In the Observer Sensitivity subscale ( $\alpha = .84$ ), participants look at situations in which they notice or learn that someone else is being treated unfairly, put at a disadvantage, or used; for instance, “I am upset when someone is undeservingly worse off than others.” The Beneficiary Sensitivity subscale ( $\alpha = .84$ ), asks participants to look at situations that turn out to their advantage and to the disadvantage of others, such as, “It disturbs me when I receive what others ought to have.” Finally, in the Perpetrator Sensitivity subscale ( $\alpha = .91$ ), participants look at situations in which they treat someone else unfairly, discriminate against someone, or exploit someone; for example: “I cannot stand the feeling of exploiting someone.”

**Hypotheses** Based on the results from Study 1, we predicted that superiority (e.g. perceptions of status) should mediate the association between grandiose narcissism and entitlement while inferiority (e.g. perceptions of victimhood) should mediate the association between vulnerable narcissism and entitlement.

Other subscales of the Justice Sensitivity Inventory should strengthen the case for superiority- vs. inferiority-based entitlement. Specifically, grandiose narcissism should negatively correlate to beneficiary and perpetrator justice sensitivity, because grandiose narcissists should not feel guilty for benefiting from or being the cause of an injustice (e.g. Krizan & Bushman, 2011). That said, these subscales should not mediate the link between grandiose narcissism and entitlement as they are indirect measures of the proposed mechanism. Grandiose narcissists are concerned with their inherent superiority (e.g. being naturally deserving), not necessarily concerned with fairness judgments or having internalized emotions such as guilt for being better off compared to others. No strong predictions were made for observer justice sensitivity as past research has documented narcissists' capability but low likelihood to feel empathy for bystanders (Hepper, Hart, & Sedikides, 2014).

## **Results & Discussion**

Table 3 outlines the correlations, means, and standard deviations of continuous variables used in this study. All continuous predictor variables were mean-centered prior to conducting mediational analyses. Replicating results in Study 1, the NPI-16 and HSNS were significantly positively correlated with psychological entitlement (PES). Furthermore, as predicted, the HSNS positively correlated to victim justice sensitivity (JSI-Victim) while the NPI-16 negatively correlated to beneficiary and perpetrator justice sensitivity (JSI-Beneficiary and JSI-Perpetrator). These correlational results support the hypothesis that vulnerable narcissists view themselves as



inferior or disadvantaged and identify with being a victim. In comparison, grandiose narcissists do not feel inferior in life and instead are more likely to benefit from or actively cause others' misfortune.

| Table 3  |        |        |        |        |        |        |      |      |
|--|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|------|------|
| <i>Study 2 Variables: Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations</i> |        |        |        |        |        |        |      |      |
| Variable   | 1      | 2      | 3      | 4      | 5      | 6      | Mean | SD   |
| 1. NPI-16  |        |        |        |        |        |        | 5.16 | 3.38 |
| 2. HSNS  | -.07   |        |        |        |        |        | 4.11 | .75  |
| 3. PES   | .50*** | .19*   |        |        |        |        | 3.32 | .95  |
| 4. JSI-Victim  | .09    | .36*** | .41*** |        |        |        | 4.64 | .93  |
| 5. JSI-Observer  | -.02   | .12    | .16    | .54*** |        |        | 5.04 | .78  |
| 6. JSI-Beneficiary   | -.23** | -.14   | -.21*  | .03    | .36*** |        | 4.52 | .89  |
| 7. JSI-Perpetrator   | -.24** | -.13   | -.20*  | .02    | .34*** | .61*** | 5.54 | .97  |

*Note.* NPI-16 = Shortened Narcissistic Personality Inventory measure of grandiose narcissism; HSNS = Hypersensitivity Scale measure of vulnerable narcissism; PES = Psychological Entitlement Scale; Justice Sensitivity Inventory (JSI): JSI-Victim = Victim subscale; JSI-Observer = Observer subscale; JSI-Beneficiary = Beneficiary subscale; JSI-Perpetrator = Perpetrator subscale. \*  $p \leq .05$ ; \*\*  $p \leq .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$

To test the mechanisms behind grandiose and vulnerable narcissists' sense of entitlement, we utilized Model 4 of Hayes' (2013) PROCESS macro for SPSS, with a bootstrap sample set at 10,000. As seen in Figure 1, using perceptions of higher status to mediate the link between the NPI and PES revealed significant mediation. The effect of grandiose narcissism on psychological entitlement was mediated by perceptions of status, indirect effect  $b = .04$ , BootSE = .01, 95% BootCI [.02, .07]. Thus, the tendency for people higher in grandiose narcissism to report higher entitlement was statistically accounted for by their subjective perceptions of being superior or perceiving that they are better than others.

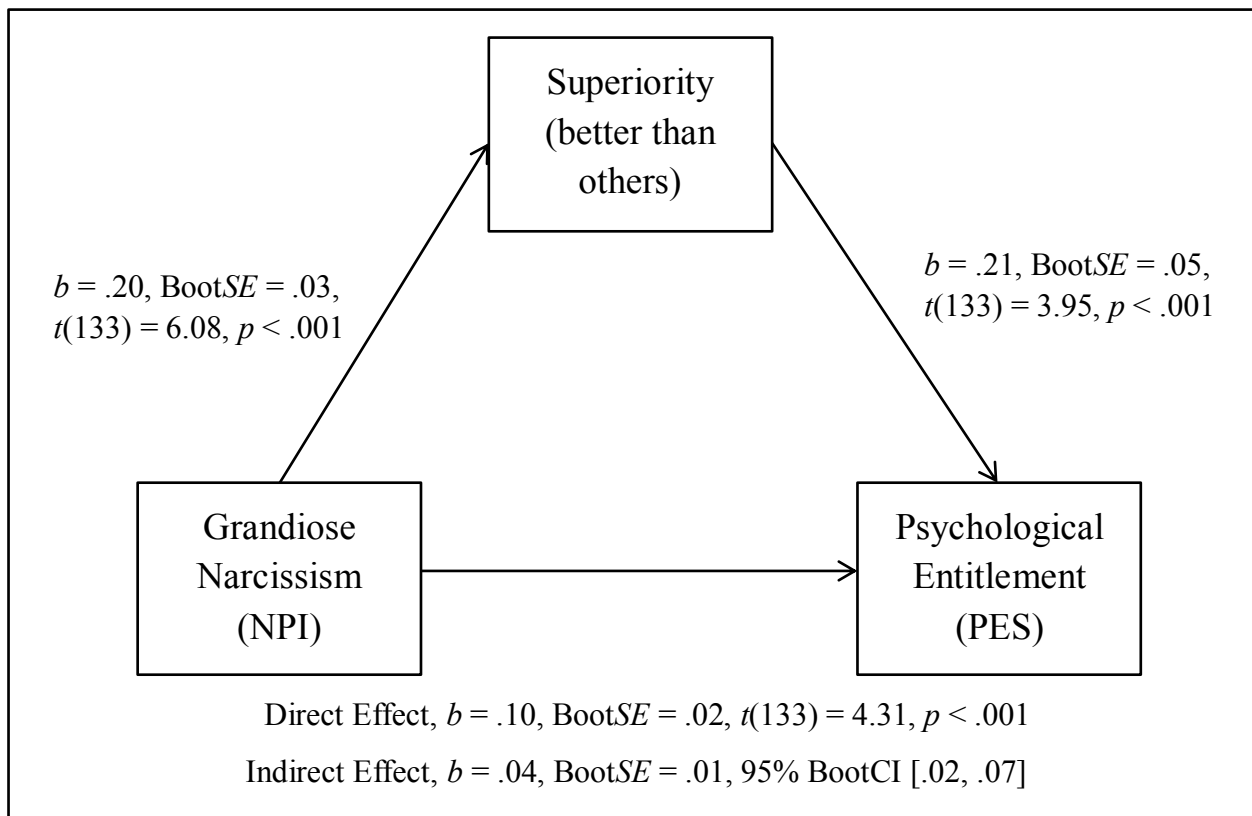


Figure 1. Grandiose narcissism mediated by perceptions of superiority predicts level of entitlement.

We also see indirect support for this mechanism through analyses incorporating the JSI subscales. Specifically, even though the NPI negatively correlated with the JSI-Beneficiary and JSI-Perpetrator subscales, these subscales did not significantly mediate the NPI and PES, indirect effects: all  $bs < .01$ , all  $\text{BootSEs} < .01$ , all  $95\% \text{ BootCI } [-.02, .02]$ . This indirectly supports the prediction that grandiose narcissists do not justify their entitlement through fairness judgments or a lack of feeling guilty. Grandiose narcissists are instead primarily concerned with their inherent superiority (e.g. being naturally deserving), whether or not it's objectively warranted. Notably, none of these models explained vulnerable narcissists' sense of entitlement, indirect effect: all  $bs < .10$ , all  $\text{BootSEs} < .06$ , all  $95\% \text{ BootCI } [-.002, .23]$ .

To understand vulnerable narcissists' sense of entitlement, we used the JSI Victim subscale to mediate the link between the HSNS and PES. As seen in Figure 2, the effect of vulnerable narcissism on psychological entitlement was significantly mediated by victim justice sensitivity, indirect effect  $b = .18$ ,  $\text{BootSE} = .05$ , 95%  $\text{BootCI} [.09, .29]$ . Thus, the tendency for people higher in vulnerable narcissism to report higher entitlement was statistically accounted for by their higher perceptions of being disadvantaged compared to others.

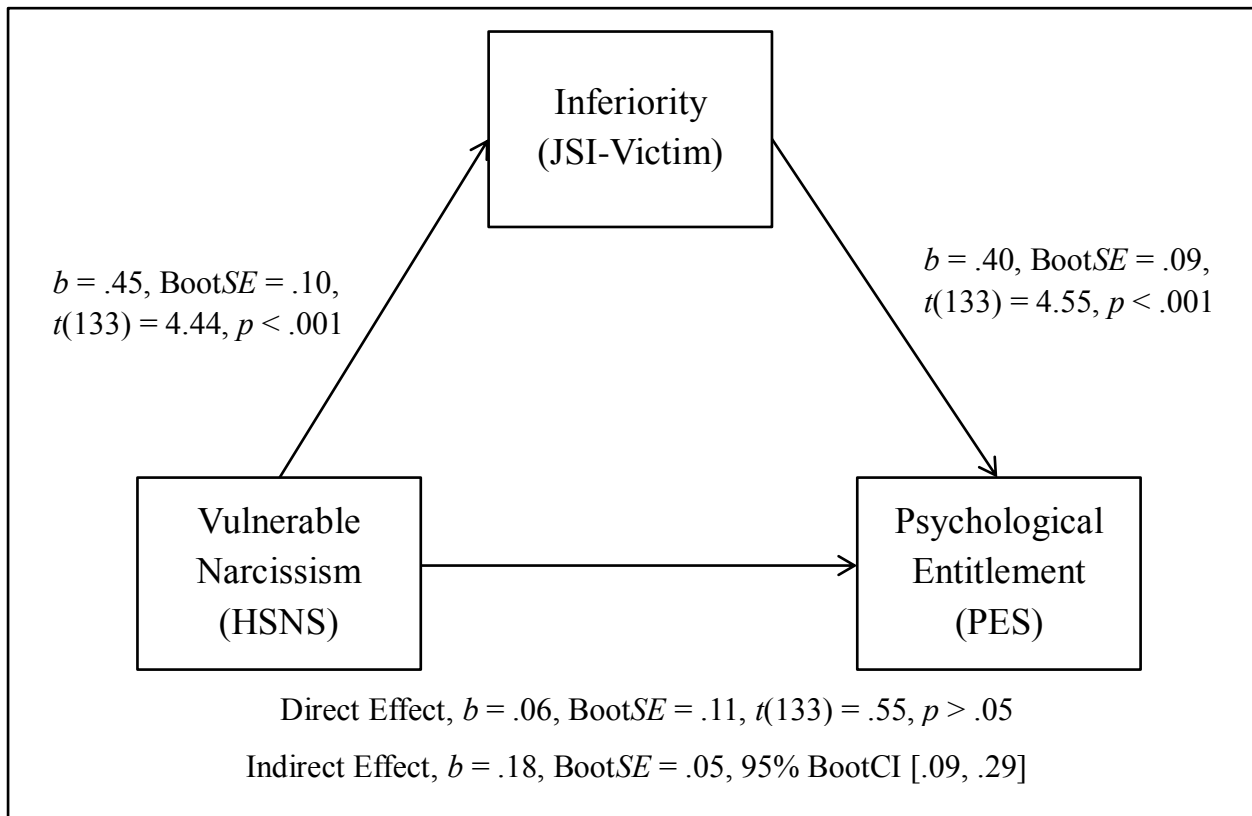


Figure 2. Vulnerable narcissism mediated by perceptions of inferiority predicts level of entitlement.

These results provide greater support for the hypothesis that divergent bases of entitlement exist among the narcissistic subtypes. Grandiose narcissists feel naturally superior and thus deserving; vulnerable narcissists feel inferior or unfairly worse off but draw the same conclusion about their deservingness.

### General Discussion

The goal of this work was to identify the divergent bases of entitlement among two types of highly entitled individuals. These studies find that the narcissistic subtypes are each highly entitled but come to hold these entitled beliefs through different processes or bases of justification. Specifically, grandiose narcissists were found to hold high entitlement through positive judgments of the self, not contingent on their fairness judgments compared to others. Grandiose narcissists maintained their sense of distinctiveness by disagreeing with statements such as “Everyone is deserving of this” and used more superiority-based justifications such as “I am naturally deserving” to explain the domains to which they felt most entitled. In comparison, vulnerable narcissists were found to hold high entitlement through inferiority-based judgments where they felt like a victim compared to others. Vulnerable narcissists used statements such as “I have been disadvantaged in the past” and “Others have this and I do not” to justify the domains to which they felt most entitled. Moreover, in mediational analyses, grandiose narcissists’ high level of entitlement was uniquely accounted for by their perceptions of superiority whereas vulnerable narcissists’ high entitlement was accounted for by their perceptions of inferiority.

**Future Studies** The studies presented here were not without limitations. For example, these studies relied on a college sample of participants, but future studies may investigate whether the current findings generalize to other populations which exhibit more variability in terms of age, education level, etc. (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010; Sears, 1986). In addition, these studies are correlational in nature. Future work could strengthen these findings by manipulating a person’s sense of superiority- or inferiority-based entitlement and observing changes in intrapsychic and interpersonal consequences.

**Implications** Beyond addressing current limitations, the current research also stimulates further theory for the study of entitlement as an individual difference variable when asking what engenders these bases of entitlement. We propose that different experiences of self-absorption or self-centeredness may skew how individuals interpret information and consequently cultivate justifications to support their entitled beliefs. For example, a grandiose narcissist who reflects on her greatness will likely generate a greater number of inherent superiority-based arguments to confirm her entitlement. On the other hand, a vulnerable narcissist who ruminates about his disadvantaged experiences compared to others may accumulate information to justify his deservingness through inferiority-based reasons. While narcissism helps illustrate the diverse experiences two entitled individuals may have, these processes could apply to any individual absorbed in themselves. If we can understand these more basic cognitive processes, we may better understand how to combat the different bases of entitlement.

Once we better understand the different bases of entitlement we may then translate these theoretical understandings into practical applications. The effectiveness of intervention programs designed to diminish entitlement, for instance, could be greatly enhanced by targeting the different processes of entitlement. In assuming that all entitlement is experienced the same, interventions may have unintended consequences. For example, interventions designed to combat academic entitlement may successfully mitigate one individual's sense of superiority-based entitlement but not affect, or even fuel, the level of entitlement of another individual with inferiority-based entitlement. Thus, the ability to identify a person's basis for his or her entitled beliefs holds potential benefits for those trying to manage or reduce entitlement levels.

**Conclusion** We have proposed in this paper that entitlement may arise from superiority- or inferiority-based justifications and that the basis for individuals' entitlement can impact how

they think about and engage in the world. The distinction between individuals' entitlement bases provides both theoretical and practical implications. You can once again imagine the college student who expects a good grade or the gunman who expected sex. The gunman's entitlement may have been based on his inherent-superiority (e.g., "I am no longer a child, I thus deserve sex") or his entitlement could have been based on feeling unfairly inferiority (e.g., "All these other men are having sex but not me, that's not fair, I deserve it too"). These different bases of entitlement may lead to different consequences later on – perhaps even harmful behavior that seeks to restore what the individual perceives as "deserved" justice. This is where further research on this topic is needed. Understanding how these bases for entitlement can manifest will enable us to better spot it in everyday life and, perhaps, to develop better strategies to mitigate it.

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